

Thornlie chaplain's Noongar connection is 'moorditj'

LEARNING a new language can be challenging, but for YouthCARE chaplain Christine Thomas, learning the Noongar language has been a practical way to connect with the students at Thornlie Primary School.

Mrs Thomas took up the classes earlier this year through the Langford Aboriginal Association, which is open to all people.

After a few lessons, Mrs Thomas decided to put her knowledge to good use.

The result was the creation of 'Noongar Language Groups' which run at the school at the beginning of lunch.

"The students bring their lunch and we greet each other, ask each other how we are doing and play games, sing songs or do activities around sticky hands and mouthfuls of food – all in Noongar language," Mrs Thomas said.

"This has been fun and has helped the students engage with their culture and the local language."

The students are welcome to bring a non-Aboriginal friend with them if they want.

Staff at the school have also encouraged the students to attend the groups and even let them use some of the words in class.

"I think the students' attendance and participation speaks volumes about their response," Mrs Thomas said.

"It has also opened opportunities to build relationships with and within the families.

"A Year 2 student told me he liked the class because he could teach his mum the words. Isn't that great?"

While there have been some challenges, such as learning new pronunciations and finding time to practice her vocabulary, Mrs Thomas said the experience had been enlightening.

"My challenge is to stay ahead of the students and find the answers to difficult questions and tricky words from them," she said.

"I have met some wonderful, open hearted and open minded Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people through my classes at the LAA and had some fantastic cultural experiences.

"This journey has opened my eyes to some of the injustices in our history as a nation and the work that needs to be done to build practical reconciliation."

Principal Lee Woodcock said the students had demonstrated wonderful enthusiasm and aptitude for this year's lessons.

"These classes give Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students an appreciation and better understanding of the language and its origins," he said.

"They create an opportunity for students to discuss, learn and enjoy this important skill in a supportive school environment."

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